The Black Cat

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The Black Cat

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The Reapers.

BY BATTERMAN LINDSAY.

OME years ago, when the Boom was abroad in the land, it invaded the Northwest Territory with peculiar frenzy. Cities sprang up out of the prairie as by enchantment; not tent and shanty "cities," mind, but metropolises, with long, straight streets, and imposing brick and stone blocks which housed banks, real estate offices, hotels, real estate offices, saloons, and restaurants, and real estate offices, commercial establishments, real estate offices. Tram-car lines were projected, if not built, and electricity made night luminous. Presently, when the town lots were all sold, the speculators departed, and the investors settled down to business, and began eating each other while waiting for the country to settle up and railroads and commerce to arrive. When they had exchanged commodities with one another until their stocks were exhausted, or foreclosed by the wholesalers in Toronto, Victoria, or St. Paul, they silently stole away, one by one, without folding their tents, which remained as monuments of man's gullibility.

To o[illegible] these deserted cities, from which the Last Inhabitant had fled some time since, there came one afternoon in spring the Reapers, a man and woman. They came from the South, in

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a Concord coach, filled to its utmost capacity with their effects, and took possession of the town. They chose their domicile gayly, with reference to a convenient stable for their horses, of which they had four. Two they turned adrift to shift for themselves, and two they kept. The home of their choice was a Queen Anne cottage in the suburbs, where a few neglected rose-bushes still survived in the garden.

"If we get tired of housekeeping, dear, you know we can go and live at the hotel," said the woman, and she laughed delightfully.

"Yes," said the man, "or we can take a suite of rooms and board at the restaurant," and then they both laughed.

It was great larks, getting settled in their house. The woman, who was rosy, and plump, and dimpled, did not perform much of the hard work, but her laugh was an incentive. She sat about on boxes, with her skirts tucked up, and supervised, or on the verandah railing and watched the pruning of the rose-bushes, which she had a fancy for reclaiming. She was not much of a cook, but they managed between them, with many fugitive caresses, by the way, to prepare sufficient for their needs. Laughter, and song, and foolish badinage made the hours fleet. If there were a Past that it would have been burdensome to remember, neither remembered it. This was a new world, and they were primal creatures in it, beloved of the dew and the sun, the moon and the stars in their courses.

When the weather tempted, they rode about the country, exploring it. They hunted together, he teaching her to be expert with her small rifle; the hunting was pastime, but it was also needful to vary the larder. He planted and tended a garden, that they might have salads and green peas, and potatoes for the winter. (He had been a farmer's son before he was a bank president.) In the evenings, as they sat on the piazza, she played the mandolin and they sang college ditties together.

Theirs was an idyllic existence, and a moralist would have been incensed to observe how kindly was nature, and how little remorse preyed upon their minds. Everything was food for amusement. The pyramid of tins, of all shapes and sizes, that grew up in the back lot as the canned goods disappeared from their storeroom,

in appeasement of their wonderful appetites, they called the Tower of Babel, because of the variety of languages that found representation on the labels.

They laughed at the acoustic effects which accompanied their footsteps through the empty streets. She said it was the Ghost of the Boom, prowling around the haunts of his former triumphs.

They explored the deserted buildings, and rooted out all sorts of flotsam and jetsam. Once it was a bundle of love-letters left in a bureau drawer. They read them with shouts of mockery. Again it was a row of empty fruit jars, which they appropriated to put over their tomato plants. Another time it was a pile of advertising circulars setting forth in florid terms the advantages of their present place of residence.

"The advantage of its solitude was the one advantage they never thought of advertising; and now it is the only one that procures it the honor of our society," said the man, and, as usual, they laughed.

Then it was a pile of old periodicals, that they carried away and devoured with avidity — which was a bad symptom, if they had stopped to think of it. They went into the rotunda of the hotel, and tried all sorts of vocal gymnastics to rouse the echoes in the tiers of empty rooms. They took Solitude by the ears, as it were, and made faces at it, and laughed always.

They got into the way of calling themselves Adam and Eve, and said to each other that they were happier outside the garden than ever they were within it.

"Is not this divine?" said Eve, as they sat one twilight hour on the steps of their little porch, her head upon his shoulder. "We thought it would be an exile, but it is heaven. I don't want ever to go back among people. Here we are all-sufficing to each other, but back in the world, some day, some one would find us out and point the finger at us."

The man tightened his clasp around her supple form. "You know," he replied gravely, "that we counted upon that. You thought you would be able to bear all that, and more, for love's dear sake."

"And so I can," she said; "but this is better."

"Well," he replied again, "we have the best part of a year be-

fore us, you know, for you to change your mind in. By the time the supplies have given out, I fancy you will want to see people, if only at a distance. Everybody will have given up looking for us by that time, and we can slip away to South America somewhere for awhile, and be as secluded as ever you please, and still within reach of human companionship, if we desire it."

"Have you looked at the money lately?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Who would steal it?" he returned, laughing.

"Anyway, let's look at it," she persisted.

So they went inside, lit a lamp, and undid their boxes and examined the hoard. "It is not so much, after all," she said discontentedly. "You never can do anything with all those papers. Why not burn them? They are a great weight to carry about."

"No, they are of no value to me," he replied. "But they are of immense value to other fellows. Some day I shall be able to make terms with those, and then we can live where we please."

"Do you believe," she asked, drumming absently on the edge of a box with her taper fingers, and not looking at him, "do you believe, really believe in your heart, that you will be able to slip away so easily when we go out of here — back again among people?"

"If I didn't believe it, I should not have undertaken it," he answered. "Don't you believe it, too? You did once."

"Did I?" she said. "No, I never looked so far ahead. I don't now, for that matter. The present is enough for me. Don't let's lose any more of it mooning over this horrid box. Come away."

As the autumn approached, life began to wear a less holiday aspect. Fuel must be provided for the long winter; the wild grass, growing rankly in the city streets, must be cut and cured for the horses; the potatoes must be dug and stored. Eve followed Adam about everywhere. 'Two is company, but one is a crowd, in a deserted place. Too many viewless things make themselves felt and heard under such circumstances.

"What were we thinking of, that we didn't fetch a dog?" said Eve one day. "He would have been a lot of company, and protection, too."

"Protection from what, the serpent?" asked Adam, and then they both laughed.

One night one of the horses was taken sick. The man came in after a lantern, and the woman followed him out. All night they worked over the animal, fomenting him with hot water, and dosing him like a Christian. In the morning he was better. "Dear," said Eve—then, not before, "what would become of us if anything were to happen to the horses?"

"We should have to invent a flying machine," the man answered lightly; but there were lines in his face that were not there the day before. With the first rain of autumn, their cottage leaked like a sieve. "We shall have to go to the hotel," they said simultaneously.

Accordingly, they moved as soon as the storm was over. They chose a sunny suite of rooms, with windows facing the south, transferred their belongings, and made themselves cozy for the winter. Of stoves and ranges, as well as many other bulky articles of furniture, they had their choice. It was while this flitting was in progress that a queer thing happened. Adam was away with the wagon, and Eve was alone in their apartment, arranging it with housewifely instinct; quite absorbed in her occupation, and humming softly to herself, she was not in the least startled just at first, when a little cooing voice behind her said, "Mamma!" "Yes, dear, what is it?" she answered, with her mouth full of tacks. Then, at the sound of her own voice in the empty room, she threw up her head and looked about her, aghast, breathless, beads of perspiration starting out on her face, suddenly grown pallid with the pallor of a corpse. After an instant she cast herself on her knees, half beside, half over, a couch, and sobbed with the abandonment of despair. Thus Adam found her when he came back. It was the beginning of the end. He never left her alone again, longer than to go downstairs after an armful of wood, but even in the midst of conversation she would stop and say, "Listen! Now don't you hear it, the steps in the hallway?"

To be sure, the great empty building was full of whisperings and patterings, rustlings, and sighings, and moanings, enough to shake stronger nerves than hers. Often a low, intermittent hum went on, like the buzz of voices. At times they could all but

make out the words of the conversation. That, he satisfied her, was a draft of air circling about in the rotunda. The footfalls he never could hear. The Voice she said nothing about; and indeed it was a good while before she heard it again.

But the footfalls and the whisperings were more than she could endure. "Let us go! Let us leave this dreadful place!" she murmured pleadingly at last.

"I am afraid it is too late," he replied, regarding her anxiously. "It is liable to snow any day now. But we will move. We will find some smaller, cozier house, where there are not so many noises and echoes. We will go and look for one right now."

They went out under a leaden sky, and found a residence in tolerable repair that gave promise of dry quarters; but the search had consumed the afternoon, and the moving must be deferred until the morrow When the morrow dawned, the snow was falling in a cloud, and any change of base was out of the question. So then they set themselves to endure with cheerfulness. Neither was a weakling. They kept themselves busy. He split wood and minded the horses, and she kept with him and helped him. She cooked and swept, and he helped her. They played the mandolin and sang, and beat one another at cards. Every day he promenaded her up and down the halls and long dining-room so many miles for a constitutional. He made a bow and arrows, and they practised archery. They played paper chase through the rooms, and, when hunted too closely, she would recall a childish accomplishment to her aid, and slide down the banisters! Outside the snow fell and drifted, and the silence of the summer became in their memories as the clatter of looms in comparison with this silence of winter, broken only by the fall of mimic avalanches from the eaves of some house, or the howl of a gray wolf drawn from afar by the scent of their beasts, stabled in the basement.

Eve seemed well on the way to recovery from her temporary panic, when one day she heard the little Voice again. They were having a paper chase, and she was eagerly pursuing Adam through the empty rooms, when the Voice said, "Mamma!" and brought her up short. After that it spoke to her with increasing frequency; never when she was listening for it and dreading it, or

(as she sometimes did) longing for it, but always when she was busy and absorbed in something else; or waking her up out of sleep, and bringing her upright in her bed, trembling like a leaf, and with wide eyes staring into the darkness. It never said aught but "Mamma!" or repeated it the second time; but she came to know at last, that from any momentary respite of self-forgetfulness, or fragmentary happiness, the little Voice would call her back to her penance. Sometimes, after it had spoken, she could hear the patter of tiny feet in the hallway or on the stairs.

So the weeks went by over the dwellers in the abandoned city, until one night they were aroused by hearing one of the horses below stamping extraordinarily. Adam arose and went down hastily to see what was amiss. He could not discover that anything was, and returned, shivering, up the stairs. The bed was empty, and in a panic he searched about the rooms, lantern in hand. At length he found Eve cowering in a corner. "Eve! Eve! What is it?" he cried, afraid to touch her. She did not answer, and her eyes reflected the light from the lantern like an animal's. "What is the matter with you, dear? Don't you know me?" he asked again, pleadingly, raising the lantern on high, so that the light fell upon his face. Reason came back to her eyes slowly.

"Oh, is it you?" she said. "I did not know who you were at first." After that he grew in a manner accustomed to behold that strange film glaze her eyes, when for a moment, as she told him, her world grew strange to her, and each familiar object became something never seen before.

One day, when he had been after an armful of wood, she had disappeared on his return. He sought her from room to room, through the echoing halls, opening every door, calling her name aloud at first; but ceasing finally, lest the echoes should add to her fright. At last, on the third floor, he came to a door that was locked.

Behind that she must be; and he knocked, and called, and besought with phrases of love, that she would open to him, but there was neither word nor movement in response. Fearing to break the door in, lest she should fling herself from the window; fearing, too, lest she should perish in the cruel cold of the un-

warmed chamber, he framed a desperate resolution. He entered the room adjoining the locked one, and, softly raising the window, crept out upon a narrow ornamental cornice, which ran around the building below this third tier of windows. It was coated with ice, and a chance as desperate as a man would care to take in any strait. But because he was reckless of consequences, he passed in safety the short distance separating the windows, and stood on the sill of the next in comparative safety. If he found the window fast, his daring were in vain; but it proved not to be.

He raised the sash with the heedfulness necessitated by his situation, and let himself into the room, but the woman there was oblivious to his presence. She was kneeling in the vacant room, upon the bare floor, surrounded by the empty white walls, with her head drooping, and arms moving gently back and forth as if swaying a cradle, while she smiled and crooned a soft lullaby. Noiselessly he turned the key in the lock and stole away; he returned presently with a blanket, and gently enwrapped that kneeling form, all unconscious of his touch, which had once had power by its lightest impress to send an answering thrill along every fiber of sensation throughout her frame. And then he left her to awake in her own time from a dream, to which he never referred. But the day was one that deepened the lines that the year had graven on his forehead.

. . . . . .

At length there came, one eve, a strange wind out of the upper sky; all night it blustered, and raved, and raced through the empty streets with a noise as of marching battalions. And in the dawn, great masses of snow began to come thundering down from the roofs with rush and roar. A January thaw had set in, and the air was vocal with a thousand lispings, and tricklings, and tinklings, and gurglings, and cracklings, and creepings. The very joists in the wall seemed to be feeling the running of sap in their fibers; and a fine ear might almost have detected the dance of the atoms as they took new partners and arranged themselves in new combinations throughout the northern hemisphere.

"Now let us go! let us go!" cried Eve eagerly, as she woke and hearkened; "away from this awful place!" All day the

strange wind blew, and under their eyes as they watched, the snow vanished, and the brown, wet earth steamed in the sun.

On the second day they turned their faces southward, their wagon weighted with their scanty stores — and the treasure-box.

The prairie lay bare before them, but the man knew well that the mountain passes which rose between them and freedom were still choked with snow.

But the woman said, "Go! I must go, whatever comes of it!" and he made no further demur. So they wended onward, over the moisture-reeking land, with its swollen streams and myriad pools in every hollow of the plain.

. . . . . .

It was some weeks later that the Avenger found them, and when he found, his hand fell empty of its vengeance; for this was the manner of it: Frozen, standing upright in a huge snowdrift, where the blizzard had overtaken him, was the man. With his gloved hand shielding his brow, he was gazing southward, as if mapping out a path on the plain below. At his back gaped the portal of a mountain defile, a wintry chaos of glacier-riven rock and snow-laden firs, drooping like weeping willows under their icy burden.

Passing his enemy by, the Avenger pressed on into the gorge; around its first turn, in a sheltered nook, he found her whom he sought. But his hand fell empty again, whether of vengeance or of pardon; for on her, too, the ice-king had breathed. She was crouched before the ashes of the extinct fire; around her lay scattered widely the contents of the treasure-box; while clutched close to her breast by her rigid fingers, as though she would shield it from the storm, lay a strange bundle — a faded shawl rolled into the semblance of the muffled form of a child. Upon the frozen whiteness of the icy wall behind her were traced with a blackened ember, in a woman's uncertain handwriting, these words: —

"The Wages of Sin is Death."

Afar off in the wilderness the beasts of the wild prowl through a deserted city, moldering into decay while yet the timbers of its framing are unseasoned; and the Ghost of the Boom remains in undisturbed possession of his kingdom.

A Kindergarten Hold-Up.

BY MABELL SHIPPIE CLARKE.

SAM MURPHY knew no difference between right and wrong, except that, as policemen objected to certain things, it was not wise to do those things when an officer was near. As Sam and the other boys ran away always whenever one of them cried "Cop," no matter how innocent their diversion, it was not to be wondered at that his standards were somewhat confused.

He did not distinguish between truth and falsehood. The language which served his purpose best was, in his opinion, the language wisest for him to use.

As to stealing, the rule that Sam followed was of the simplest, — "If you see anything you want, get it if you can."

It had been a source of pride to Sam's father and mother that they had evaded the officials and kept him out of school. He brought beer for them, though they always complained that the measure was not full when he was the bearer. He took care of the baby. He was too useful as a recipient of stray kicks and curses to be allowed to go to school.

It was when Sam was a stunted, old-looking boy of ten, and the baby, Sal, was five, that many things happened.

For several years he had made a living by holding horses, selling papers, blacking boots, and taking unto himself any stray articles not properly looked after by careless owners. He smoked and drank whenever he had a chance. He swore almost as choicely as did his father. He sat in the upper balcony at the theater and whistled shrilly when any of the actors uttered patriotic speeches. He could read a little, having learned from signboards and from the head-lines of the papers that he sold.

Being quite able to take care of himself, it made no difference in his welfare when his father was sent to jail for life for kill-

ing Sandy Mike Sullivan in a fight. His mother and the baby seemed to get on as well as usual, and it was several months before Sam noticed that he was kept short of money all the time, because his mother asked him so often for "Jist a nickel, Sammy, bye."

He knew for what she spent it. It was no new thing to him to see her drunk, and he did not care if she were; but it galled him to think how she had been doing him out of his money, when he prided himself on his sharpness. So he put an end to this drain on the exchequer by the simple expedient of not returning at night to sleep in the one room that the Murphys called home.

It was two weeks after he adopted this plan before he thought that he would like to see the baby,— Sam was fond of the baby, — and climbed the steep stairs of the tenement house. The door of his mother's room was open. Sam stepped in and looked about. Not so much as a chair was left. He gave a prolonged whistle, and went across the entry to Mrs. O'Brien's to make inquiries.

"Where's me mudder?" he asked, dispensing with preliminaries.

"Dead," replied the frowzy woman before him, with the unconscious brutality of her kind.

"How?"

"Got drunk, an' fell down the stair an' broke her back, God rist her sowl."

"Where's de baby?"

"The cop, he took her to an institution."

Sam turned away without another word. There was a queer feeling inside of him. He thought it was because Sal had gone to an institution, than which he held nothing in greater horror, not even the jail.

With a heritage of vice and a training in crime as his equipment for this world's warfare, Sam entered upon his independent career. He was quick and shrewd, and he always could fill his stomach, and not infrequently his pockets. At times he procured regular employment, — once as guard for a green goods man, to let him know of any danger when he was interviewing a "sucker"; once, after he had grown into a broad-shouldered

fellow of great strength, as "bouncer" for a saloon. But he preferred to live by his wits, — there was more excitement in it.

It was fifteen years after his mother's death that a morning in late May found him on the outskirts of a suburban town, Norham, near Boston. Sam always tramped for six months in the year. He had developed a taste for the country; he made a living easily, and met agreeable companions. Usually he rode on freight trains at night, and walked the country roads in the daytime. This morning he was in a temper at variance with the sweet May air that filled his lungs. By mistake he had left the train at a greater distance from the village than he had realized; it was already after nine o'clock, and he had had no breakfast.

Fortunately, he spied a cottage in the distance, and bent his steps to it. As he came near, the cottage resolved itself into a plain white building of a shape common to New England, and he heard children's laughter and singing, and the tramp of little feet.

"It's a bloomin' school," he muttered. "No grub here."

Still, he did not continue his walk, for now there sounded from the piano a lively march which he had heard many a time from the street bands in New York. Besides, he saw in the square entry-way of the old-fashioned schoolhouse, beneath little coats and hats, a row of luncheon baskets. He eyed them critically.

"Dere ain't a square meal in the whole of 'em, but dere better'n nothing;" and he stepped cautiously in, and devoured the contents of the first three receptacles in the row in an incredibly short time.

He was consuming a bread and butter sandwich, when, in the midst of the second mouthful, which was also the last, his eye fell on a little hole in the corner of a pane of the glazed glass door. The music had ceased now, and a confused and soft-toned murmur was heard that aroused Sam's curiosity.

"Wot is them kids doin', I wonder," he said to himself, and applied his eye to the hole with the promptness that characterized his arrival at a decision.

Once in command of the scene, Sam remained motionless and lost in amazement. Ten, twelve, seventeen, he counted, of the prettiest little creatures, boys and girls, the oldest not over five.

He had seen children like them in the Park in New York, but never so many together, or with their hats off. Yellow curls and brown, blue eyes and black, and an array of white pinafores, whose clean crispness impressed Sam like lace and ribbons.

It was a kindergarten established by the early comers among Norham's summer residents, who had hired this deserted schoolhouse, not very near any of them, and hence equally accessible — or inaccessible — to all, had had it fitted up with long, low tables and little chairs, and had installed therein as teacher a ward of Mrs. Humphrey Brandon's.

As Sam watched, the little people about the tables began to model in clay, while the teacher told a story of a mother bird and her birdlings; and one after another of the pretty children went to her to show the nest and eggs which had grown as the tale progressed.

Looking and listening though he was, Sam neither saw nor heard a little girl who ran to the door behind which he stood, and pulled it open, revealing to the astonished teacher and children a disreputable, unshaven tramp, in a stooping position.

The teacher sprang to her feet in alarm, though in an instant she was controlled, that she might not make the children afraid. She was a girl of twenty, and not comely, though her face looked sweet and motherly, as she clasped one sobbing child to her breast, and walked a step nearer to the door.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

Now the unmasking of Sam's ambush had disconcerted him more than he would have acknowledged even to himself, and the effort at recovery of his self-possession caused him to assume the air of audacity which had made him for years the idol of the urchins of Mulberry Bend. It angered him, too, to see how the mere sight of him standing in the doorway had thrown into confusion the pretty scene on which he had been looking. Straightening himself with an air of impudence and command that made the poor teacher shake with fright, he replied to her question.

"Wot kin you do fer me? A lot, miss. I come to see you an' de little kids. Trot 'em out. Show me dere paces;" and Sam seated himself in the magisterial seat, with an assumption of being very much at his ease, and an effort at resemblance to a

well-known alderman whom once he had seen take the chair at a primary.

"You mean that you would like to see some of their games?"

"Yes. An' have 'em sing," commanded Sam.

Here was a way to quiet the children, who, in their accustomed routine, would forget the forbidding aspect of their visitor. Making them form a circle, their mistress lead their thin, sweet voices in the song of the carpenter and farmer, with gestures illustrative of their occupations. Then they sat in their little chairs and listened to an account of the lighthouse and its usefulness to sea-farers, and they built lighthouses of blocks, and "sweet teacher," as one child called her, lighted candles in some of them, and sailed a paper boat, safely avoiding the reefs and danger points marked by the lights.

Sam looked on with an interest amounting to absorption. Never had he supposed that childhood contained such interests, such pleasures, such stores of information. His mind went back to his own early days, and he dimly felt that its excitements were not to be compared to these delights. He thought of his father and mother. He had heard that his father had died in jail. He had spent two years in the same jail himself. He never looked for his mother's grave — never even asked its whereabouts. He thought of Sal, and wondered. It was years since any of them had come into his memory.

The blocks were being put away to the music of a merry tune, when the teacher's voice reached him as from a distance, and her face was seen as through a mist.

"Would you like to see the children's weaving?"

Sam nodded grimly without looking up, and gazed with an approach to reverence at the little figures that brought him pattern after pattern of woven strips of paper, and the little fingers that held the sheets. He hardly saw the first ones, but, as the mist cleared away, occasionally he nodded judicially, saying: —

"Bully," or, "Bloomin' pretty, little kid."

A feeling of shame came over him that he had been so touched, and he felt that his autocracy needed support; so he leaned back in his chair, thrust his thumbs into his armholes, and ordered: —

"Teacher, make 'em march."

She had placed them in line, with the tallest boy at the head, and was passing by him to go to the piano, when the tramp suddenly exclaimed: —

"Stop!" — in a tone that made her knees vibrate.

"Where did yous git dat?" he said, pointing a dirty finger at a silver coin hanging from her watch chain, and adding reassuringly: —

"I ain't goin' to swipe yer ticker, don't be scared."

"This? I've had it always," returned the girl, holding up the dime with its engraving on one side. Sam took it between his thumb and finger, very much to her discomfiture, and read on it, in well-cut letters: —

SAM.

and underneath, rudely scratched: —

SAL.

There came to his remembrance like a flash the day when he had found that coin engraved with his name, and with a hole drilled through it, in the street, and how he had taken it home, and had scratched on it with his knife the baby's name, and had tied it about her neck with a piece of pink string.

"Who are you?" he demanded, looking at her earnestly, and still holding the coin.

"Sally Brandon."

"Go on."

"Mrs. Humphrey Brandon's adopted daughter."

"Who's yer father?"

The girl was almost crying.

"I don't know. I came from a home in New York. Mrs. Brandon adopted me and had me trained to teach."

"Why'd she call you Sally?"

"They told her at the home that that was all of my name that the policeman who took me there told them, and they gave her this to keep for me. It was round my neck when I was received."

Sam now was sure of her identity. She was Sal, the baby. He looked at her keenly, then sat down again, saying briefly: —

"Set de kids agoin'."

While the merry march sounded against his deaf ears, Sam revolved the situation. Under ordinary circumstances, if he had found any one whose "leg" he could "pull," he would have pulled it without hesitation. Something of the sort he thought of now, for he had no doubt but that he could persuade her of his identity, even though her baby mind had retained no memory of the tenement-house days. At any rate, he could frighten her out of money.

But, strangely enough, he did not want to, and this for the first time in his life when there was a chance of "boodle."

He looked at her smooth hair, her sweet face, her neat dress; he watched her skill as the music ran out from beneath her swift fingers; he remembered her control over the children, and her evident knowledge of her profession. His thinking resolved itself into a murmur inaudible to her.

"I guess she ain't got no use fer a brudder like me; an'," he added with grim humor, "I dunno's I could use a sister like her."

So never a word said Sam on the subject, and when the march was over he took his leave.

"Much obliged, teacher, fer yer perliteness. I wisht I'd a had a school like dis when I was a brat, an' I'm much obliged to de little kids, too. Good-by."

"Good-by!" they shouted in chorus, and the little girl whose weaving he had described as "blooming pretty," cried: —

"Come again!"

Sam stepped into the open air, and looked at the blue sky, and up and down the road, and then walked off with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, whistling very loudly the march that the teacher had just played.

The Guardian of Mystery Island.

BY DR. EDMOND NOLCINI.

ON the white slope of the sandy beach at Orr, a company of fishermen, just in from the night's catch, were variously employed in loading, disposing of their traps, or mending their nets. There were two quiet figures in the picture outlined in the clear summer atmosphere between the shore and the sea. A young man, who marked three points ahead in the line of intellectual development, was standing beside an overturned boat, upon which was seated an old fisherman, engaged in mending his net, and conveying to the attentive ear of his companion some interesting bits of information concerning the surrounding islands of the bay. There were relative values an artist would have appreciated, afforded by the contrast in dress and person of the two men. The fair, sensitive face of the young man, with his lithe and elegant figure coolly clad in white flannel, was a complement to the burly form of the sailor, roughly clothed, and with weather-stained features composing a simple but kindly countenance, well shaded under an oilskin hat.

"No land twixt her en Spain, sir."

"A period between continents," interrupted the young man jocosely.

"En I wouldn't go anighst her fur all the gold en the mint. Thar's plenty of land twixt her en us, thank God! Ye ken see she's the furtherest out nor all the islands."

"Yes, I see, Tom," replied the young man, directing a quizzical glance toward a small dark spot between the two spaces of blue. "She must be ten miles out."

"Nigh onter it."

"Well, what is out there to prevent a man from visiting your 'Mystery Island,' if he wants to?"

"Fur one thing, sir, Kidd's gold ez buried out thar, but thar

hain't a feller on this yer coast dar's to go anighst it. Cauz the cove, what's only a narrer cut twixt two cliffs thet crawls inter sarpent ledges under the warter, makes it a damned nasty place ter git inter, even ef it warn't guarded —"

"Guarded? Guarded by whom?"

"A dorg, a confounded sperret dorg, with eyes like lighthouse lanterns, thet kin be seed ten miles out, whenever anything is goin' ter harpen. Whoever sees thet ar dorg might just's well make peace with God, fer he hain't likely ter stay round much longer 'mong men."

The young man, whose name was Lenartson, — Sam Lenartson, — laughed outright. It seemed the most ridiculous story he had ever heard credited by otherwise sensible men.

He determined at once to administer a rebuke to their foolish superstitions.

"Tom," he said, wheeling about impulsively, "give me a dory and a pair of oars, and I will go out there to-day and explode all your thrilling romance about the island."

"My God, sir!" Tom dropped his horny hands helplessly, an ashy pallor creeping over his face.

"Yer don't know, sir. Twenty years ago, sir, there was a party of young chaps from the city, who wouldn't hear to nuthin', went out there en never come back. Ye hain't lived round these parts en watched the signs. Thar's the awfullest rocket strikes this yer coast en a hurricane every time thet unarthly beast ez seed. 'Twould be like a helpin' ye to commit suicide; et's damned folly ter think uv et."

"Tom, you might just as well let me have your boat as to put me to the trouble of getting another, as I shall certainly go out to Mystery Island, and I should like to go this morning. I vow solemnly to break the awful spell which has power over you only from your belief in it. And when I have entered the cove, braved the dog, and upset the kingdom of the devil supposed to be established there, not one of you fellows will dispute my right to Kidd's gold."

Tom's revolutions of thought were too slow to frame a new objection. Hypnotized by the spirit and energy of his companion, he rose from his seat, pointing doggedly at the boat.

"Ef ye will, ye will, I spoze; take her en go; ye don't go unwarned.

"Ye ken look out fur a squall," he shouted after the departing youth, who flung up his hat like a person taking leave of a party of particular friends, as he paddled out.

Sam was not by nature over-cautious, so that the admonition regarding the weather gave him no concern of mind as he floated past the beautiful islands of Casco Bay. One after another they disappeared behind him, as the island for which his oars were bent loomed up more definitely before him. Suddenly, conscious of a chill penetrating the atmosphere, he looked up, to remark a marshaling force of clouds that, unperceived by him, had been marching up the heavenly plain for the last half hour, and were now rapidly darkening with a summer shower.

An ominous lash of the wind struck the bosom of the great deep. With a startled throb, it lifted the boat sharply. Sam looked around him with critical and troubled eyes.

He was not far from the little cove, which presented itself as a sharply inclined sand-bar displayed between the cliffs that rose precipitously upon either side of it.

But the ledges upon either side of the passage rendered it so narrow and dangerous that they were called the Black Snakes. Around them the seething tide boiled like a witch's pot, flinging the white foam of the angry billows high against the cliffs, that returned it with such force that a boat carried in this direction must have been doomed to certain destruction.

Just as Lenartson was about to breast the wave which should have carried him safely into the little harbor, a fierce gust of wind from an unexpected quarter seized upon his light craft, and before he could make an effort to resist it, he was whirled about broadside upon one of the rising breakers. In this position, half capsized and water logged, blinded by the falling rain, his face wet by the salt spray, he must have been borne to certain death had not the capricious wind, playing with the frail craft like a paper toy, suddenly reversed it. Thus it was set upon the crest of a falling breaker in such a direction as to be flung into the cove, landing with a sharp collision some twenty feet up the beach.

The shock threw Lenartson face forward, where he lay for a

moment half stunned. Then, as a flash of light and crash of thunder aroused him to a sense of danger, he sprang out of the boat, dragging it up the incline just in time to save it from the returning wave. After finding a broken stake, to which he secured his boat, he fled to the trees, seeking shelter from the rain among the tall and serried columns of pine and fir, whose thick mat of interlaced branches made the darkness almost impenetrable.

When, the shower ended, light through the breaking clouds penetrated the internal fastness, Lenartson discovered a rank growth of foliage not common to these islands nor the latitude in which they were located. Everywhere flowers and plants of variegated hues were massed in such rich profusion as to suggest the land of the deadly cobra, while even the more familiar trees had reached a height and breadth that seemed wholly foreign.

As he began to work his way through the thick undergrowth toward the interior, he came to the conclusion not only that the island was uninhabited, but that the place had not been marked by human footsteps for many years, as the small animals, and the birds that flew from cover, seemed quite fearless.

He had but just arrived at this conclusion when there rose upon the air the distinct bay of a dog, apparently not many feet away.

Evidently some one else had chosen the same day to pay a visit to the island.

Led by the sound of the animal's voice, he soon emerged upon what had been a small clearing, but at the present time was entirely covered with the second growth of trees, shooting up over an area of a hundred square feet. Here, amidst a medley of decayed stumps and underbrush, he saw a rude board hut, before which, with his nose in the air, sat the dog who had led him to question and investigation.

But, far from being the formidable creature of the fisherman's yarn, this noble wreck of the mastiff breed was ill fitted to hold midnight revels with hurricanes and to conjure with infernal powers, since every fiber of his poor old body seemed to call for a blanket and a kennel.

His eyes, instead of appearing the baleful globes of fire that fishermen's fancies had made visible ten miles out at sea, were rather dim and piteous in their appeal for friendly recognition.

The poor creature had somehow missed his master — or such was Sam's conclusions — and in dog anguish thus lamented his misfortune.

"Hullo, old boy! have you lost him? Well, never mind, we'll set that straight directly."

Having convinced himself by a glance into the interior of the cabin, which was filled with spiders' webs and their crafty weavers, that it had not been used for many years, Lenartson turned once more to the dog.

"Come, Jack," he said, "let us go after your master."

With one of those peremptory barks that is interpreted as dog consent, the great lion-like creature bounded into the thicket.

This action served to reveal what had at one time been a path, but now, like every other effort of man here, indicated a contention with, and partial subjection to, the native wildness of the woodland.

Through bramble and brier they pushed along the overgrown path, the dog still ahead, until a space of light suddenly penetrated the open branches of the trees. A moment later, they emerged upon a plot of ground, where was revealed to Lenartson's astonished gaze a stately old mansion, built of stone, and enclosed by neglected terraces and overgrown gardens, upon which, at some time, had been bestowed much expense and care.

Now, however, the sharp tooth of time had gnawed into the vitals of the old place, from the broken chimneys and sunken flags of the walks to the defaced and fallen fence, rotting away beneath the mold of the drifting leaves.

The deserted house conveyed an air of melancholy to all of its surroundings.

It seemed a little singular to the young man, as he came upon this scene, that no person at Orr had ever mentioned its builders and occupants to him.

"Why not?" he wondered.

The dog left him no time to consider this point at length. He bounded up the steps, ran across the stone veranda, and leaped through the wide door into the hall, at the entrance of which rose a flight of winding stone stairs.

As Lenartson made haste to follow him, he had time to notice

that the curtains at the lower windows were rendered almost invisible from the outside by the thick veil of dust encrusting the glass panes. He further felt the chill of a damp and moldy house while ascending the stairs.

The upper hall presented a tableau in still life of open doors, dusty floor, and cobwebbed corners. His steps seemed to evoke a ghostly ring of answering echoes through the vacant halls. As the dog passed through one of the open doors leading off at the right of the staircase, Lenartson paused upon the threshold to listen to the labored breathing of a sick or dying person.

Another moment, and his singular quest had brought him to the bedside of an old woman, lying beneath a heap of worn silk quilts and battered blankets, tossed about her emaciated figure in utmost confusion. The lips, thin, seamed, and crossed by yellow wrinkles, were parted above toothless gums in an almost vain struggle for breath. The talon-like fingers clutched nervously at the worn coverlid, as the great creature at Lenartson's side leaped upon the bed, lapping the withered cheek of his mistress; then settled down, with his head upon his paws, and his eyes fixed in appeal upon the stranger.

In bewilderment Lenartson glanced about the room, to observe, here as elsewhere, the absence of care denoted in the carpet of dust upon the oak floor, the array of cobwebs festooning the ceiling or woven across the brocade shades depending in sags from the four large windows of the room.

Here was a mystery of Mystery Island that made his blood boil with indignation. An old woman! Abandoned, it was evident, and dying thus, unattended except by a dog, her last earthly friend!

As he entered, she regarded him with no apparent recognition of a human presence, but turned the wandering glance of her wild, dark eyes toward a crucifix placed upon a table near the head of the bed. This crucifix was the only thing within reach of her vision to suggest solace to the dying, as there was neither bread upon the table to sustain her perishing frame, nor water to cool her parched lips.

"You are sick," affirmed the young man, with great pity vibrating in his voice; "what can I do for you?"

At the sound she sprang up in bed, and glared angrily upon him from dark and cavernous eyes. She stretched forth her long, lean arms, away from whose unlovely bones fell the tattered lace of her nightrobe.

"Pierre! Pierre!" she almost shrieked, as Lenartson shrank repulsed from the uninviting embrace. "At last! at last! Oh, my God, why did you leave me alone in this strange deserted land?"

She spoke in French, and Lenartson, understanding it well, thus discovered her lineage.

Then she had been deserted, this poor old creature, — a refugeé from a sunny land, abandoned to a life of wretchedness on this forsaken isle.

"Madame," he interrupted in reverent sympathy, "I am not Pierre; I am a stranger, providentially brought to you in this hour of need. What can I give you, food or drink, and where can either be found?"

With a supreme effort she pulled herself forward, a movement that called his attention to the glittering rings that hung upon her yellow, shrivelled hands.

"Ah! you would deceive me, and to what purpose, I ask?"

She pointed in his face her old, skinny forefinger, an index of scorn shaken by wrath.

"Sir, I command you to leave me. If alone, well, so be it. If the King's head has fallen, it is a pretty piece of business these dogs have done. Never fear, the end will find France restored to reason. We shall make another King. No, sir! I decline your assistance in this matter. We are not a race of cowards."

As these scenes unshadowed themselves, she used first this tone of haughty complacency, and then, when the full horror of some fearful situation made itself felt, she threw up her arms with a cry of terror.

"What are they doing, these brutes in the street? It is she, my dear lady. Quick, give my cloak — this way — we must not be seen. The Bastile has fallen! It is the Conciergerie where they would carry our innocent, woe-white queen! It is dark, my dear, — give me your hand, — we are suspected, but we are also protected. Let us fly! The nobles are in the winepress, the

people are on top — blood flows, curses darken the air. This is not France, it is a pandemonium; it is a mad-house; it is hell!"

Through this hurried, breathless speech of terror, Lenartson stood as if rooted to the spot. At the close of it Madame sank, white with exhaustion, among the pillows. Then, as the dying candle fire flickered into a blaze, the old lips muttered: —

"Have mercy, my lord! Do not leave me with these rough fellows even for so short a time. Do you believe the weak hand of a woman can protect such immense treasure? The earth where it lies buried is but an open storehouse, when, by your absence, the lock is removed from silence, and that devil, cupidity, which I see in each man's eye is free to manifest itself.

"Ah! the weed — the devil-weed! I had not thought about it. Plant it to-morrow upon yonder ledge that will lift it to the sun and air. Superstition will stay their greedy clutch for your gold, sir count. It will live, — like the evil in men's hearts, it is too viperous to die."

She tossed herself uneasily. Great drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead.

"Pierre! Pierre!" she moaned, "it is not a devil-weed, it is a soul bound and restless; it is my soul shrieking silent maledictions to heaven.

"Ah, sir count, it was an awkward slip to take a woman from palaces and thrones to a hut in the woods; from association with princes to a company of thieves. But the gold tempted you, my poor count. For the promise of a title under the new régime we plotted — a pirate sold to you the secret of hidden treasure. He had sailed with the great captain; he knew it was here. We were an odd assemblage, I vow, but the house was built by stealth, of material brought in the ship, — the treasure concealed. It was thought to be a secret, but when two have a secret it becomes public matter. Your devil-weed was planted to secure the gold. Your devil-weed — only a little evil, like the incipient causes of a revolution; the hand that cozened it into unholy life and nurtured its growth grew weak as the evil grew strong, to encompass the land. So, with the count's devil-plant, the treasure was no longer protected; it was buried and consumed by that thing which he brought from India, — a little curling, crawling weed,

concealed in a golden box, a cousin to the breathing plant, but an apostate, a wretched outcast from the world of flowers, embodying all their passion of growth and reproduction, yet endowed with the cruel instincts and power of a viper."

What was she talking about? There seemed so little coherency in what she said.

From what he could patch together of this ragged information, it led him to suppose she was a refugeé from the French Revolution, who had sought these shores in company with her son, or whoever Pierre or the count might have been; that in their flight they had fallen in with a company of buccaneers, who had piloted them to this spot, where now lay concealed beneath some monstrous growth their hidden treasure. But, hark! she spoke again, placing her hand on the dog's head.

"Ah, Rollin, is it you? You are more faithful than men. They left me alone here to die, — for I am dying, — but in death I will not lie in quiet amidst this savagery of nature.

"Would it be possible, if my body were bound to this accursed soil, that my spirit could abandon the scene of its torture? No! no! I should traverse the earth until the resurrection of the dead. Like yonder devil-plant, to which my feet have worn a path through the wilderness, I should writhe and creep and live, forever.

"Back to France! O souls of the dead! if ye have ears for mortal complaint, — if ye bear in your spirits a kinship and sympathy for human woe, I call upon you to witness the last cry of my embodied spirit for the land of its nativity: Bear me back to France!"

With a shriek of agony that made Lenartson's blood curdle, she threw her face, in the last desperate action of despair, forward upon her knees. Lay thus, with her features concealed, her arms stretched forth, and her hair straying loosely about her thin, white figure like a scant and shredded veil.

Lenartson, shocked and awakened from his trance, hastened to lift her so as to give her air. Too late! The candle had flickered out. She was dead.

Gravely he composed the old limbs and worn features of the Grand Madame. What a sad romance. How singular that he should have witnessed the closing scenes of such a tragedy!

Having done what was possible, he determined to return to Orr, to give information of what had happened. And if it was true that treasure was concealed on this island, the final cry of the departed soul should be answered. She should be carried back to France. First, however, he must solve the final mystery of the gold and the devil-plant.

After a short search he discovered what appeared to be an overgrown path, which led out of the garden toward the interior, directly opposite to the one by which he had entered, and began at once to make his way through it.

At length he arrived at an open space where, for half a mile, the trees were dwarfed at every point of the circle where they approached it. In the center of this enclosure of green earth, thus denuded of shrubs and trees, there was situated a long ledge, rising in some places to a height of thirty or forty feet. All about it the tall grass pliantly bent to the light touch of the wind. Covering the entire cliff, and often dripping to the ground along the face of it, was a peculiar mass, whose narrow, spiked leaves presented a living sea of green. The entire plant seemed to be endowed with voluntary motion, as without apparent cause it rose and fell like the jerky hunch of an inchworm, or the ceaseless motion of the waves of the sea.

Some of the limbs of the plant dropping over the head of the boulder were as large as the body of an anaconda. They were clothed in smooth, mottled bark somewhat resembling the skin of that reptile in color. The limbs and stems were set about with a glossy corolla of leaves, about four inches between each cluster. From their centers depended a bunch of tendril and a cluster of flame-like, star-shaped blossoms. Long, and dank, and dark, this beautiful devil-plant swung to and fro. At an interval of about ten seconds the limbs and tendrils contracted in such a manner as to bring all of the leaves together so as to entirely conceal the branches upon which they grew, then stretched forth again.

It was this singular motion, somewhat like that of the breathing plant, which caused the heaving, crawling motion of the whole mass above and the tremulous vibration of the limbs below.

Curiously fascinated, Lenartson crept somewhat nearer, hoping to determine something of the character of the plant's malign influence without perilous adventure.

As he approached nearer and nearer, fixing his eyes upon the plant with the suspicion of watching for an enemy in ambush, he kept pushing his foot cautiously through the long grass. "Was it here?" he speculated, "or over yonder, directly beneath that restless sea of leaves, the great treasure was buried?"

Suddenly he struck something concealed in the grass that leaped upon him, coiling with such a sharp, unexpected pressure about his feet and ankles, that, thus entangled, he was jerked from his feet, falling backward upon the earth. In this position, before he had time to struggle to his knees, he felt himself being rapidly drawn toward the cliff, upon which grew the great mass of the devil-plant, a limb of which, serpent-like, coiled and concealed in the grass, had caught his wary feet and was now rapidly coiling up his body, to bear him with angry jerks toward the great monster plant that, to Lenartson's horrified eyes, appeared to rise and approach him, full of malignant life. At that moment he remembered a fish knife which he happened to have in his pocket, and, seizing it, he commenced a desperate attack upon the vine as he struggled to his knees.

It was a short, sharply contested battle, in which the man realized that, once within the grasp of the great mass of deadly limbs and viperous tendrils of the great plant, there would be no more to-morrows for him upon the earth.

He succeeded none too soon in freeing himself from the obnoxious embrace of the fearful thing, whose wounded part continued by jerky hunches to retire toward the main body, trembling to receive it into its umbrageous bosom; while the severed portion about his legs, with a faint quiver as of departing life, uncoiled itself and dropped, with the soft thud of dead material, lengthwise upon the grass.

Filled with a great sense of gratitude and relief, not unmixed with horror, he made haste to beat a retreat toward the woodland, moving backward with his white face set suspiciously toward the enemy. When once assured that safe distance had been placed between them, he stood for some minutes watching the heaving

body of green with its serpent arms flung over the cliff. He was deeply impressed by Madame's characterization.

"It is not a plant! It is my soul shrieking maledictions to heaven."

What was it? He could not classify it as other than a rare specimen from a prehistoric period — a monstrous growth and prophecy in plant life of the mighty powers of intelligence destined to inherit and subdue the earth, significantly saved to this age for the study and wonder of man. In the unreckoned ages of its existence it had survived the sweep of universal conflagration; it had beheld the God-abandoned race perishing in the carburetted atmosphere, smothered in subterranean caverns, plunged in boiling oceans, or buried beneath mounds of burning cinders that followed the trail of the red serpent of the air. It had witnessed the age of darkness and cold, and now, a living chronicle of disaster, it had been captured by the daring hand of man and transplanted to a foreign shore.

It was five o'clock when Lenartson set out on his homeward journey. The sky was clear, the sea was calm, so that nothing occurred to withdraw his mind from meditating deeply upon ways and means by which the devil-plant might be overcome, the gold secured, and Madame's body returned to France.

He concluded that he would not speak to the people at Orr about the later portion of his adventure, as it would be likely to open inquiries that would lead to the discovery of the gold, — a secret that he did not wish at present to reveal to them.

Late as he arrived, for it was after sunset, he found Bill Maynard awaiting him. The old fisher-man greeted him with surprise and emotion, and on hearing a portion of the story, hastened to bear the tidings from house to house. In consequence, Lenartson found himself an hour later besieged at the hotel by a crowd of curious people, to whom he rehearsed the tale of the finding of the dog, his pursuit to the deserted huose, and the impressive death-bed scene of the Grand Madame.

The kerosene lamp upon the clerk's desk made a narrow circle of light around the room. In the center of it Lenartson occupied a wooden chair. He frequently changed his position as he talked.

Each strong-featured lad or bearded and weather-stained man

kept his face attentively set toward the narrator. Each sharply silhouetted ghost upon the white-plastered wall showed scarcely a tremor of the immobile figures that surrounded him. Lenartson represented all the action of the company at the center.

The young man being unpleasantly conscious of the profound impression made upon his own high-wrought sensibilities, attempted to assume an air of carelessness.

To cover a slight tremor of his limbs, which he could not wholly repress, he would push himself up on the back legs of his chair, and sit thus, with his hands in his pockets, talking almost waggishly. Then, almost irresistibly overcome by the intensity of his feelings, he would drop suddenly forward, with a tragic earnestness that made itself felt in every heart.

They comprehended at once how cruel superstition had made them to this poor old creature, the harrowing scenes of whose death-bed lost nothing by Lenartson's tragic recital, excepting her connection with the concealed gold, and the devil-plant.

Finally, they agreed that a company of twenty men should accompany Lenartson in the morning to Mystery Island, for the purpose of bringing Madame's body to Orr, where for a time, at least, it should remain, peacefully interred.

They did not separate until about one o'clock, and then, few of them who had listened to the story slept much for the night. As for Lenartson, he threw himself dressed upon the bed, from which he frequently started up to pace the floor.

All night he was haunted by the cry of Madame's departed spirit for the land of its nativity.

It lay upon him, a fearful injunction he could but obey. The devil-plant must in some way be overcome, the vast treasure unearthed, and Madame's embalmed body returned to the dear, sunny land of her birth.

As the yacht was launched, he moved among them, a strangely silent figure, with set lips and pallid cheek, his hat pulled low over his brow, his gaze abstracted from present scenes, his soul filled in all its chambers of sense with that piteous cry.

When they arrived at Mystery Island the mid-day sun had plowed his passage to the zenith without a cloud to vex his

progress. They made haste to secure their boats, then dropped into Indian file, twenty men behind their leader, pushing and breaking their way through the overgrown path toward the old house in the woods.

The sharp clink of their stout heels sprang up behind them in startling echoes along the wide hall and stone stairway.

Upon the threshold of the room Lenartson had left yesterday, so full of tragic pictures memory would ever recall, he stopped a moment, looking over his shoulder into the pale and kindly faces behind him.

"Poor old Madame! It was here, boys, I left her yesterday after all was over."

Thus remarking, he turned his face inward and approached the bed. He stood before it aghast; the bed was empty! There was the yellow, crumpled linen, there were the soiled blankets and tattered coverlid which the long, thin, bejeweled fingers had plucked at yesterday. But she and the dog were gone!

For the space of ten seconds each man stood staring in helpless silence. Then one of them ventured to suggest that he had made a mistake in the room. No one thought of doubting him. His face was too plain an index of his astonishment.

"That's it," concluded Bill Maynard. "You gut addled. Let's try another room."

Lenartson, continuing to gaze in a bewildered way at the bed, shook his head. "No, it was right here, and no other place, that I passed through the experience I have related to you. There must be some other person on the premises, and all that talk about being deserted was Madame's lunacy. Let's look about."

As they commenced their investigation, the noise of their approach and departure startled the bats from their corners in the empty rooms. Everything was covered with dust and mold; even the chairs and floors were thickly encrusted. Through the holes in the roof the rain had beaten unchecked and the resulting fungus life consumed, as it grew, the wooden sills and doorways. Cobwebs hung in festoons from the ceiling, and cut in elaborate patterns of gray lace the corners of the rooms, in one of which a rabbit had made her nest and was rearing her young. Across the threshold

of another a serpent slipped into the golden shimmer of the outer sunshine.

In a cupboard was found a china service, and a silver or pewter pot so black with long exposure to the air and moisture, its true metal could not at once be determined. And everywhere was the all-recording dust, covering the entire house like a pall cloth upon the face of the dead. There was no food, nor evidence of recent occupancy in the entire house.

Once again they looked at each other, and then to Lenartson, the question trembling upon each man's lips he feared to utter.

Superstition repossessed them. Lenartson, dazed and distressed, placed his hand against his forehead, struggling to think.

Ah! the devil-weed and the treasure! If these things existed in reality, it would establish the fact of his having spoken with a dying woman yesterday.

"Boys, I must leave you for half an hour. Will you wait for me here?"

"Out there," they consented gruffly, pointing to the garden. No man cared to remain within.

In feverish impatience he darted away from them, tearing his way along the gloomy woodland path toward the spot where that terrible thing grew.

At the point where the opening would reveal the cliff, he stopped short, struck by a chill of horror. Great drops of perspiration rolled over his face. His heart beat with stifling throbs in his bosom, while his hands clenched themselves unconsciously.

In this mood, appalled by awful doubt, he dashed out into the open space, — then stopped short, an exclamation of joy bursting from his fevered lips. Thank God, it was there, and she had been!

Steeped in the still sunshine of the upper air, that monster plant still crawled over the gray head of the great boulder, emitting fiery sparks from its bosom, as with each lift of its huge body the round rings of its red blossoms flashed into view. The long, gray, snake-like limbs, bristling with their gay corolla of spiked leaves, swung, contracted, and lengthened, exactly as he had seen them yesterday.

Cautiously he crept forward, his nervous fingers clutching the

handle of his knife, treading carefully through the long grass which appeared to grow here like some dangerous accomplice of the enemy.

Now he understood why no shrub or tree grew near the boulder. The devil-plant had, as it grew, grasped, one after another, every living thing which could afford resistance to its malignant clutch. It had made itself a supreme evil in the garden of God, annihilating all living beauty excepting the long, pliant grass, through which it might creep and glide towards the object to be destroyed.

Not a wonder Madame, who knew its nature, moaned, "It will encompass the land." And the treasure beneath it — Ugh! the whole thing grew uncanny. He commenced to feel that any attempt to recover a treasure upon which rested the curse of Madame's passion-withered lips would prove fatal. He could almost see the ghastly glistening of dead men's bones impaled in the meshes of that fearful thing. An accursed root had sprung out of the practical Maine soil, engrafted upon it from some kingdom of the damned.

A shadow crossed the sun, followed by another and still another in quick succession, like the swift lifting of gigantic wings.

The trees shivered. The air leaped at once into strong currents, gathering velocity and darkness as they traveled. The sky lowered with a blaze of fury, followed by deafening thunder and accompanied by the roar of the sea.

Lenartson felt himself raised bodily by the wind and dashed down again like chaff. In terror, lest the mighty breath of the tempest make him the plaything of yonder devil-weed, now tossing forward and flinging up its long, crawling arms into the sulphurous air, he grasped the trunk of a tree with his arms, and flung himself face down upon the ground.

Ships went down everywhere along the coast that day. Their own boat dragged her anchor and was driven upon the rocks. Houses were unroofed and blown about like paper toys. It was a day of doom. It was like the passionate protest of the dead in league with the elements.

"I would haunt the land forever. I will not lie on this accursed soil. Bear me back to France!"

Pale, and shaken, and drenched by the pitying floods of the

sky, Lenartson crept back, when the tempest was past, to the old house, where he met a company of stern, white faces.

"Boys," he said brokenly, "I cannot talk of what has happened on this mysterious island. I only ask to be taken away. Bill Maynard, give me your hand, old boy. I am no longer able to jeer at your superstitions."

None seemed inclined to talk.

When at last they swung out upon the broad, blue breast of the ocean, under a sunny sky, every man thanked God he had left the place forever.

And although at times some bold lad dares to steer his skiff beneath the haunted cliff, where he declares the dog Rollin may still be seen on watch at the cove, there has been none other ambitious to investigate the mystery of Mystery Island.

The old house in the woods remains untenanted and unvisited. Dank and dark the devil-weed swings in the undisturbed silence of its green oasis.

The treasure buried upon the island is to many but a vague speculation. To Lenartson there appears no doubt as to the reality of the concealed treasure, and the Grand Madame is to him one of the most marvelous mysteries of life. Who was the Grand Madame? What was it that he saw at the old house? What did he hear? He had not slept and dreamed. Was it a visitation from the other world? A disturbed and earthbound soul enacting the closing scene of its mortality? If not, what? Where did the Grand Madame and the dog Rollin disappear?

A Mental Mischance.

BY THOMAS F. ANDERSON.

ALBERT REEVES could never fix the exact date when he discovered that he was a mind reader. Whether he had been born with the power or had been suddenly endowed with it by some unexplainable agency will probably always remain a mystery. But this much is certain: He was yet comparatively new to this world and its wicked ways when the fulness of the mysterious power was upon him, and was not yet twenty when he began to put it to a practical, money-making use.

Young Reeves first utilized his unique gift in this manner as an amateur detective, with the same success as when, a few years earlier, he had been able to divine the intentions of his school teacher toward him in the matter of corporal punishment, by getting that worthy's mind in occultation with his own. In the same manner he had been able to quickly gauge the real depth of feeling entertained toward him by the various young ladies of his affection, and he often remarked that if others were kindly favored by nature with the same power of mental analysis, the divorce courts would not have to hold so many extra sessions as they do nowadays.

Naturally, his detective career was a wonderful success. Indeed, he might have achieved the fame of a Byrnes and Vidocq in one had he chosen to remain in that profession, for he had the advantage over all other detectives in that he was enabled not only to read the thoughts of a guilty man, but to diagnose the mind of a man who had not committed a crime but was planning to.

In this way he could not only detect crime, but could prevent it, which is really the first duty of a police force, according to the printed instructions that are posted up at the station-houses.

Many a time indeed this remarkable man walked into a bank,

ostensibly to have a note discounted or a check cashed, but in reality to see if the cashier or paying teller were contemplating a sudden raise of salary at the expense of the institution; and more than once his efforts were rewarded by discovering a trusted official hovering on the brink of a precipice, as it were, perhaps ready to fly with his ill-gotten gains that very night, had not Reeves been instrumental in saving both the official and the bank.

But in spite of his phenomenal success, the detective business palled upon young Reeves before he had been in it two years. There was too much human misery connected with it, too many broken-hearted wives and children, too many ruined homes. The money earned from other people's wretchedness fairly burned in his pocket. Besides, his inclinations had always pointed to newspaper work, and while he lacked training as a writer, he knew that the reputation that he had already won in the police department was the best possible guarantee of success on that great detective agency, the daily press. And so it proved. Within three days after he made known his proposed change of calling, Reeves received five tempting offers from as many big dailies in New York, Boston, and Chicago, two of which had come by telegraph, while a third was tendered by a special messenger who had traveled hundreds of miles to make the proposition. Of course, the police departments of various cities and the leading detective agencies in the land made heavy counter bids to retain him, but to no purpose.

After a week's deliberation Reeves accepted a position as special writer on the city staff of a metropolitan daily, where he was welcomed as a unique and valuable addition to modern journalism. Of course he didn't fill an editorial chair. A journalistic mind reader would have had little chance to exercise his powers inside the four walls of an office. But in his position as star reporter he rose almost at a bound to the position of the leading newspaper man of his time. In less than two months he had gained such a reputation for phenomenal "scoops" that his photograph was displayed in the shop windows along with the Duke of Marlborough and the latest theatrical star, while his life was made the subject of half a dozen articles in the popular periodicals. And this reputation he won in the simplest possible way.

He had only to go to any man, no matter how high in official station or how taciturn and reserved, and by simply getting his subject's thoughts fixed upon the desired topic, could drag from him, without his knowledge, the fullest details of the affair.

Statesmen and cabinet officials, with weighty secrets of the greatest public importance locked up, as they thought, in their own minds, were as easy prey for him as the bank cashiers used to be when he was a detective.

Nothing that he got upon the trail of ever escaped him, and the country almost became involved in a war with another nation once, on account of the premature publication of some momentous diplomatic secret that he had brought forth from its hiding place in Washington.

Naturally, this phenomenally endowed young man's paper became so famous for forecasting accurately great events, exposing big criminal conspiracies and discounting gigantic railroad deals, that its circulation grew to enormous proportions, and before he had been on its staff six months it was quoted as an infallible authority all over the land.

Reeves had worked on like this for about a year, gaining new laurels day after day and getting his salary doubled as regularly as the month went by, when he awoke one day from his absorption in his profession to the fact that he was accumulating gold as well as glory. To his savings in the detective service he had added during the past year everything except his very modest living expenses. And he now found himself the possessor of the nest egg for a fortune. With this discovery a new idea flashed into his busy brain. Why not take advantage of his great mental power and make himself a second Vanderbilt or Rockefeller by watching the big deals in the stock market? If "insiders" who were not mind readers could make princely fortunes out of their knowledge, why couldn't he?

The idea had no sooner suggested itself than he put it into practice.

It worked like a charm.

All he had to do was to walk into the offices of George Gould, or Russell Sage, or Chauncey Depew, or any of the other big men who change the railroad map or the industrial situation to

suit themselves, and talk pleasantly about the weather, or the crops, or the prospects of this or that stock.

Then if, on the occasion of such visits, any of these great manipulators had a big scheme on hand, Reeves quickly became an "insider" on his own invitation and bought or sold stocks as the case demanded.

In less than six weeks he was independently wealthy, forging ahead of all the younger financiers as easily as he had outrivalled his journalistic colleagues.

One day about two months after this newest young Napoleon of finance entered upon his Wall Street career, he became convinced that a "deal" of more than ordinary proportions was on foot. He tested a dozen big men of his financial acquaintance — for he was able now to give even big men valuable "tips" occasionally — without getting any satisfactory clew, and finally decided that a certain well-known financier, who seemed to be on the minds of those whom Reeves had sounded, was the man he wanted to get at. As it happened, Reeves was on specially friendly terms with this financier, who was of a somewhat literary turn of mind, and liked nothing better than to discuss the degeneracy of journalism and kindred topics with the brilliant young journalist. Accordingly, the young man received a pleasant greeting when he presented himself, although he soon discovered that the financier was very deeply engrossed in some important matter.

It was an oppressively hot day, and the headache Reeves had acquired in his excited search for the all-important clew caused his brain to be less receptive than usual. He had no difficulty, however, in learning that the magnate was struggling with the details of some great "deal."

While they sat there and talked about a rather trivial matter that the younger man had made the excuse for his visit, the latter fixed his mind on the other's as well as he could in his fatigued state, and what he learned almost sent him into a delirium of excitement.

The thought transference took place rather slowly, but when it ended he was in possession of information concerning one of the most gigantic pieces of stock manipulation that the century had witnessed.

Without going into details, it contemplated the consolidation of some twenty-five of the biggest railroad systems in the land, many of them heretofore at odds with one another, in a manner that could not fail to at once send up the value of all of them at least twenty-five per cent., and in some cases fully fifty per cent.

Millions of dollars were to be saved in expenses alone, and the aggregate capital represented was almost beyond ordinary comprehension.

Just when the deal was to be consummated, Reeves could not determine, but as the mind of the financier seemed engrossed with its details, to the exclusion of everything else, the young man felt assured that the date could not be far removed.

In a week, a day, an hour even, he told himself, as he left this friend's office, the gigantic scheme might be sprung on the public. The stock markets, both here and in London, would be thrown into a frenzy of speculative madness, and railroad stocks would jump to fabulous figures. Now was the time to act. By investing his fortune immediately, Reeves could, as he found by swift calculation, literally own, if not the earth, at least a big share of it. Strangely enough, however, this knowledge, instead of exalting him, only steadied his nerves. During his walk from Wall Street to Broadway, Reeves evolved his whole plan of action. It was then within an hour and a half of the time when the banks would close, but in less than three quarters of that time he had drawn out every cent of ready money that he had on deposit. Then hurrying back to Wall Street, he proceeded to unload every sort of negotiable security he possessed, and to place orders to buy on margin blocks of stocks representing every one of the railroads that were in the deal. This accomplished, he felt that in a few weeks' time he would be able, if he liked, to pay off the national debt or restore the gold balance.

That night the young man's self-control gave way, and he went to bed with a raging fever.

. . . . . .

When he awoke again, he painfully asked the white-robed nurse standing near his bed, how long he had been there, for it didn't take him long to realize what had happened.

She replied, "Ten days."

Next day they allowed him to have a newspaper, and he nervously turned to the financial page. Almost the very first paragraph his eyes fell upon was one describing how Burlington, Northwestern, "Nickel Plate," and several other of the big railroads in the great "deal," had already dropped ten to twenty-five points "since the big silver panic set in one week ago."

. . . . . .

Two or three months later, while he was still convalescing, young Reeves received a nicely bound volume. It bore the signature of his friend, the literary financier, and was proved on examination to be a fantastic novel of the twentieth century, entitled "The Great Railroad Revolution."

For the first few pages the invalid gave only a languid interest to the tale, which opened like half a dozen other stories he had read of the "Looking Backward" variety. But when he came to a certain chapter, wherein was described as one of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century the gigantic consolidation of the Burlington, the Northwestern, and a score of other big systems, he let the book drop from his hand.

Like an electric shock it came to him that what he had read in the literary financier's mind on that fatal day had been, not a speculative scheme, but part of the plot for a novel! Instead of being on the verge of consummating a railroad deal, the man had been simply evolving from his imagination a chapter based upon the modern tendency toward combines. It was upon the fantastic fancy of a novelist, and not the schemes of a financier, that Reeves had staked and lost a fortune!

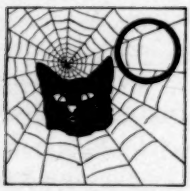
Albert Reeves is not reading other people's minds any more. Whether it was the fever or the fact that he had once read a mind falsely that destroyed the charm can never be determined; but this is certain: since the day when a cog slipped in the wheel of his fortune, the mysterious power that so nearly made him one of the magnates of the world, is his no longer.

If he had not lost his money also he would not have cared so much, for he could then have bought out a paper or opened a real estate office.

As it is, he is now working as reporter at a salary of fifteen dollars a week.

The Barber of the Alpena.

BY J. HARWOOD.



ONE summer evening, two or three years ago, a group of passengers were sitting on the after-deck of the steamer *City of Alpena*, of the Detroit and Mackinac line, upward bound.

Most of them were strangers to each other, but, as fellow-passengers, they had been brought into social contact for the time, and the conversation was general.

There had been some talk on the subject of acquaintances formed in this way; and of men who, living in places far apart, and following widely different avocations, were brought together by the controlling force of circumstances, and for a few days traveled the same path.

Thence the conversation had drifted to employments and pursuits in general, and the causes which determined their choice; the consensus of opinion being that what seemed chance was really more potent than any deliberate process of choice.

"You can prove that by me, gentlemen," said a man who was sitting with his chair tilted back against the rail.

I had frequently noticed this man about the boat during the trip. He was a glib, voluble fellow, and was selling a patent chair of his own invention, which he called the "Mechanico-Artistic Wonder." It was a curious, complicated affair, suited to the uses of barbers, dentists, surgeons, and invalids; it was adjusted by means of a system of joints, levers, arms, cogs, and what not, and was specially adapted to the purpose of permitting the occupant to assume, or be placed in, any possible position or posture of which the human body is susceptible; and, if desired, as in the case of an insane patient, of holding him fast when so placed.

But what attracted special attention to the man was not his

invention, but his face. Ordinarily, and when in repose, there was nothing out of the common about it; but the moment that he became keenly interested or excited, his features underwent a startling change.

At such times, his nose, which was a pronounced aquiline, seemed actually to push itself forward from his face, drawing the skin so tightly that the bridge seemed breaking through it, showing a narrow white strip down the middle; while the upper lip was drawn up at the angles of the mouth, exposing about a quarter of an inch of the sharp, white points of his canine teeth. This odd protrusion of the bridge of his nose also tightened and drew forward the skin under his eyes, — which were set very close together, — bringing down the outer corners, and giving those organs the appearance of two moons in the quarter.

All the characteristics of his bizarre features were in full play as he told his story.

"I used to be a barber. It was my chosen profession from my childhood. I think it was reading about the barber in the 'Arabian Nights', when I was a kid, that fixed my choice. Anyway, I always thought, and still think, that there is no business in the world so desirable all round as that.

"I learned my trade — or art, as I call it — in the city of New York, and worked in a big shop there for ten years, saving most of my wages. About five years ago I came West and started a bang-up shop for myself in a small city, the name of which I won't mention. I am a top-notch artist, and kept good assistants, and for three years everything went well, and I made money. I had considerable education when a boy, and a taste for reading, which I always kept up. My place was first class, and first-class men patronized me, and I had personal friends and intimates among the best and most intelligent people. There was a medical college in the city, and among my friends were some of the students and faculty. One day, by invitation, I accompanied a party of the students to one of their lectures, or clinics, or whatever they call them. It was in a great barn of a room at the top of the building, with no windows but skylights. They had a dead man there, lying on his back on a table in the middle

of the room, and were dissecting his face. The professor did most of the work and talking. He would cut away at it awhile, and then explain the thing to the students. Occasionally one of the boys would take a hand at the carving, under the direction of the professor. All this time the dead man's eyes were wide open, staring at them, as piece by piece they peeled the skin and flesh from his bones! It was a horrible sight to me, and made me sick at the stomach besides, but they didn't appear to mind it a bit, but went on cutting away at that dead face, as cool and deliberate as I would go about shaving a man, all the while talking, laughing, and joking each other, as unconcerned as you please.

"I tell you it made me sick clear through; and after the longest two hours I ever spent, I was glad to have the lecture over with, and get out into God's free air again. I must have looked white around the gills, for the boys joked me unmercifully; told me to come again, and come often, and I would like it after a while. The professor, with a wink to the boys, said he thought I was intended by nature for a surgeon, and advised me to exchange the razor for the scalpel. He also offered to show me the 'pickling vat.' I declined the invitation and went home; but the affair had so upset my stomach and nerves that I was hardly fit for work for several days.

"And then began a queer state of things. Every time a customer got into my chair, with head thrown back and face upturned, it reminded me of that dead man's face, and as I stood over it with my razor, the thought would come, 'What if I was a surgeon and was going to dissect this countenance?' And then I would find myself thinking, 'Suppose I do?' and an impulse to do it in reality began to take hold of me, faint at first, but growing stronger every day. And this infernal idea stuck, and I could not drive it away. We hear of people who, standing by a well or a precipice, sometimes feel a strange impulse to jump down. At last I got a good deal in the same way. The inclination to cut and carve the faces of my customers became so strong that I felt I was fast losing control of myself. It would make the hearts of a good many prominent citizens of that town stop beating now, could they know how narrowly they sometimes escaped having their throats cut when under my hands.

"I have had the strength all go out of me, and leave me with beads of sweat standing on my forehead, and my hands all of a tremble, from the struggle I made to resist the cursed temptation. I realized what the end of it was sure to be some day, and might be any day, so I quit business for a time, took a trip for my health, and got medicine from the doctors for nervous derangement. I didn't tell them what shape my nervous fits took, though.

"Away from the shop I got better, and after a few weeks thought I was over it, and went back to work. But it was no use, the first face that looked up at me from the chair was to me that dead man's face. It happened that this first customer was the professor who advised me to exchange my razor for a scalpel. I forced myself through the job in some way, so awkwardly, though, that he spoke of his former advice, and remarked that if I couldn't handle the scalpel any better than I was then using my razor, I had better give up both and take to a shoe brush. If he had known how mighty near I came to using my razor as a scalpel on that occasion, he would sooner have been in the bottom of his pickling vat than in my chair.

"That was the last time I attempted to practise my art. I quit the business, went to work on some ideas that had been forming in my mind for several years, and invented the Mechanico-Artistic Wonder, my incomparable chair, and have since been introducing it to an appreciative public. I am all right now, am in good health and spirits, and don't think I have any murderous impulses lurking in my system; but it is not likely I shall ever return to my old trade. I like it better than anything else, and at times I feel a strong inclination to try it again; but the risk is too great. The chair business is fairly good, and growing better, and it suits me well enough, though it is not in it with the tonsorial line."

As he finished his story, the ex-barber arose from his seat, yawned, stretched himself, and looked around upon the company. The excitement of his narrative had brought into full play all the peculiarities of his eccentric features. His moon eyes were like crescents in his forehead, the bridge of his nose was thrust away forward, the white streak down the middle of it gleamed like a narrow band of silver, and the points of his sharp teeth looked like pendants of ivory hanging from the corners of his mouth.

As it was growing late, the company soon separated, and, one after another, sought their berths. I know not how it was with others, but the barber's story, with the horrible possibilities suggested by it, haunted me all night.

At daylight the next morning, we touched at Cheboygan, where my partner and I, with our guns, fishing tackle, and camping outfit, went ashore, leaving the big steamer with most of her passengers, including the ex-barber, to proceed on her trip.

A month passed, a month of life in the woods; and with brown, bearded faces, shaggy hair, and wolfish appetites, we were again in Cheboygan, on our way homeward.

Of course the first thing we looked out for was a shave, and we entered the first shop we came to. There was but one operator, and my partner proposed that I take the first turn, while he went down to the dock and looked after some of our stuff; it would take but a few minutes, he said, and he would be back by the time I was finished.

The shop was on the main street, and the chair in which I seated myself was near the window. In the excitement and enjoyment of the past few weeks, the impression which had been produced upon my mind by the story of the barber on the steamer had lost its vividness, and now I seldom thought of it.

I know the gruesome subject was not in my mind as I took my seat, laid back my head, and suffered myself to be enveloped to the chin in the customary white apron.

But as the operator bent over me, tucking in the edges of the cloth around my neck, it came to me quick and sharp as a flash of lightning. Just then he gave the back of the chair a tilt, stepped in front of me, and took a general survey of his preparations.

Oh, horrible! Is it? — no, impossible! My God, yes! It is the barber of the *Alpena!*

As his eyes met mine, they lit up with a devilish gleam, the big nose began to bulge forward, throwing into sharp relief the sinister white streak; the tightening skin drew down and inward the corners of his eyes, and his lip jerked upward, revealing the points of his wolfish tusks.

With a cry of terror, a cry that had no manhood in it, a cry

that was the howl of a tortured beast, I put forth my strength and tried to spring to my feet. Vain effort! Head, hand, and foot, I was held fast in the complicated machinery of the Mechanico-Artistic Wonder!

With every muscle strained to the utmost tension, I struggled, as a man might struggle in the lethal coil of a python, — and to as little purpose. It was as if I had been caught in the hardening rock of the earth's foundation, and there lay fast locked, immovable forever.

When, finally, utterly exhausted, I ceased my struggles, the fearful being, who, with arms folded, had been standing perfectly still, regarding me with a half smile of mingled curiosity and amusement, nodded his head approvingly, and turned to a small table covered with the tools and apparatus of his trade.

And then followed a scene of inconceivable horror.

Carefully selecting a razor from among several lying on the table, he gave it a few rapid strokes across his strap, and then closely examined its edge with eye and finger. Apparently satisfied with its condition, he slapped it briskly on the palm of his hand, approaching me as he did so.

In the agony of that awful moment, I again struggled to free myself, and sent forth cries that seemed to me should alarm every inhabitant of the town, and reach the ears of the people on the boats far out in the lake. To all this, the human hyena, in whose power I was, gave no heed whatever. He seemed neither to hear my cries nor see my struggles. He appeared absorbed in his dreadful purpose, and, coming close beside me, deliberately and gently took the tip of my nose between the thumb and finger of one hand, and with the other carefully applied the edge of the razor to my face just underneath the eye, and then slowly drew it down my cheek, and around to the point of my chin. The keen edge stung like a streak of fire, and I felt the blood trickling down my face. Another long cut on the other side, and then another, — and still another! My blood was now flowing in streams; I could feel it soaking into the cloth around my neck, and hear it dropping on the floor; and as the butcher stepped back, and deliberately contemplated the progress of his work, I saw that his hands and arms were covered with it.

A moment's scrutiny, and he was back again. Now he began cutting away and lifting the edges of the skin from the long gashes he had made. The infernal demon was flaying me, literally skinning me alive!

During all this time I was not passive. With superhuman strength, born of pain and terror, I struggled incessantly, filling the air with shrieks and cries.

The shop was on the ground floor, and, as before stated, the chair in which I was now suffering the torments of a horrible death was close to a window opening upon a busy street, along which scores of people were all the time passing in full view, few of whom went by without looking in and seeing my condition. All this I saw by rolling my eyes to one side, my head, as well as every other part of my body, being immovable. Yet, inconceivable as it must seem, not a soul came to my assistance.

Most of those who looked in at the window smiled as they passed on. Some would pause an instant and coolly contemplate the bloody tragedy, but always with an expression of amusement on their faces, and a smile as they turned away. At times groups of children would form outside the window, and with juvenile gesticulations and laughter, evince their enjoyment of the spectacle. One big boy stood for a long time with his nose flattened against the glass, and a broad grin on his face.

How long all this was going on, I could not tell. In my agony it seemed hours. And all the time the monster was deliberately and silently working away at his fearful task. I could no longer cry for help, and silently prayed for death. Would the demon never have done with his work? Should I never die?

But now the door of the shop opened, and — blessed sight — my partner entered! At once my flickering hope revived. I looked for the swift blow that should lay the monster on the floor; the wrench of the strong arm that should tear the infernal chair in pieces and set me free.

But, oh, impossible, incredible! O dastardly, treacherous monstrous! My partner stood a moment coolly looking at me, then broke into a hearty laugh, and, taking a seat, began blowing great clouds of tobacco smoke in my direction. In a moment I saw his lips move, and he spoke to me. I seemed not to hear

what he said, but summoned all my forces for one last desperate effort to free myself. Thank heaven! At last the fastenings which held me gave way. I staggered to my feet and stood erect.

At this, the barber stepped quickly back to his table and seized something, — a bludgeon, or sand-bag, or maul, I knew not what, — and began beating me about the head and shoulders. As his pelting blows fell like electric shocks, I blindly reached out my hands to grapple with him, and tried to shout something. The next instant, a cloud seemed to fall around me, filling the room and hiding everything. I could see nothing; but from the darkness came the words, clear and distinct: —

"Twenty-five cents, sir, please."

Instantly the cloud lifted, and the barber, with whisk broom in one hand, and the other extended for his fee, was standing before me in an attitude of respectful expectancy.

Mechanically — and almost unconsciously, — I produced the coin and gave it to him. With a feeling of bewilderment, I passed both hands over my face; no blood nor trace, on face or hand, of the dreadful ordeal through which I had passed! Mentally unsettled, and still more than half unconscious, I walked across the room and sat down.

"What's the matter, John?" said my partner. "You act as though you had just waked up. You looked so queer when I came in that I thought the razor must be dull. I'll give it a try now, but I warn our friend here, that if his jaw-scythe pulls too hard, I shall do something besides make faces at him."

While speaking, he took his place in the chair I had just vacated.

I looked at the chair attentively, and at the barber. He was not the barber of the *Alpena*, and bore no resemblance to him whatever; and the chair was the ordinary affair seen in barbers' shops, and not in the least like the Mechanico-Artistic Wonder! Wondering and dazed, I replied, with as steady a tone and manner as I could assume, that I felt a little dull and sleepy, and would take a stroll and a smoke while he was being shaved. I walked around for half an hour, and composed my unsettled faculties as well as I could before rejoining my companion; but all through the day, I was hardly in my normal mental condition.

I said nothing of my frightful experience to my partner then; but the next day, when on board the steamer, bound down the river, I sounded him for any possible experience of his own in that barber's chair. Upon learning that nothing strange had happened to him or come into his mind while in the shop, I finally told him the whole story. He is a kind of occultist, or theosophist, or something of that sort, and was soon ready with a full, and complete explanation.

"You were mesmerized," said he, "involuntarily mesmerized, by that barber. And as it was involuntary on his part, he was not conscious of the matter at all, knew nothing about it, and so made no suggestions affecting or influencing your mental condition or action while you were in that state. Your screams were imaginary. The people who passed laughed at you on account of your queer grimaces. The 'bludgeon' was a whisk broom. Your vision, which was a kind of hypnotic nightmare, was a subjective phantasma on the plane of your own sub-consciousness, which was saturated, so to speak, with the diablerie of the infernal story that ghastly, moon-eyed, bony-nosed vampire told on the boat.

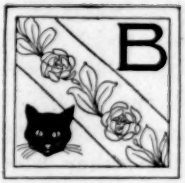
"That is the whole *rationale* of the matter; it is all simple enough."

"But," he added, after a moment's thought, "I don't believe I shall ever feel perfectly safe in a barber's chair again."

As for me, I have ever since let my beard grow: and my wife cuts my hair.

Which Was Like a Woman.

BY WILLIAM ALBERT LEWIS.



RIAN LETT sat upon his doorstep playing with the children. It was sunset. Big, brawny, good-natured, he came over the hill from Gatesville five years before, and settled. Settling in a village means getting employment, living 'most anyway, being 'most anybody. Under such conditions you're nobody. Get married, you're somebody. Brian Lett got married. She was Dorothy Moore. She had three children. She was a lawful widow. Her husband, Jack Moore, was in prison for life.

A good-looking woman may have a husband in the penitentiary and be well thought of; but she cannot remain untalked of with a single man for boarder. Brian Lett had boarded with Mrs. Moore, to help her along. It was the best thing he could do to marry her.

The village lawyer fixed things, and Mr. and Mrs. Lett settled down.

This summer evening Lett sat upon the steps playing with the three children. They were much attached to him. Bert was ten, Mildred eight and a half, and Susie seven. They called him Papa Lett, much to his liking.

Mrs. Lett was in the kitchen doing up the after-supper work.

A shadow fell across the threshold of the back door.

Mrs. Lett looked up.

Jack Moore stood before her.

"Dorothy," in a voice softer than of yore, "who is that on the front steps playing with the children?"

"My husband."

She spoke in a whisper. Her voice failed; her frame quivered; her face paled at the awful dilemma.

"You took your rights, didn't you, Dorothy?"

She could not speak; but twirled the dishcloth around in the suds.

"I am hungry, Dorothy. Can I have something to eat?"

She put him out a meal.

"The same old blue set, Dorothy; the same bread knife; the same preserve jar; and my old cup, too!"

There were tears in his eyes.

The woman looked into his face. Voices came through the hall. Lett was talking with a neighbor.

"I hear Moore's been pardoned, Lett. Do you think he'll come around here?"

The man at the table raised his eyes to those fixedly regarding him. What said they to him? They forgave him; they bade him go; they looked the love which brought Bert, Mildred, and Susie into the world.

"I am a free man. Are you glad, Dorothy?"

She nodded her head.

"I don't blame you, Dorry. You did perfectly right. But I have looked forward to coming back to you and the children. I wonder if I could see them a minute?"

She started to call them. Near the door she stopped, pressed her hand to her lips, and shrank. Lett sat upon the steps, Susie asleep in his arms.

"Good-night, neighbor," he was saying. "You are right. It's not easy to do one's duty always. Come, children, it's time you were abed. Let's go in and see mamma."

Lett arose, the slumbering child in his arms, Bert and Mildred laughing and jumping about him.

His wife sprang forward.

"Look, Brian! See, children, quick! Call that handsome dog, Brian, and let the children play with him! He's the biggest dog they ever saw."

The indulgent man whistled to the mastiff, resumed his seat on the steps, Bert and Mildred rolling with the brute on the grass.

The woman disappeared for a moment, returning with a crocheted purse which she thrust into his hand.

"Here, Jack! Take this. It is all we had saved for the children. Take it, but go! Did you — did you see the children?"

"Yes, Dorry, I saw them."

"Kiss me, Jack. They are yours. For them I love you. Now go!"

The ex-convict pressed the woman to his heart; then he opened the purse, and, taking from it a few coins, handed it back with the words: "It is enough to give me a new start in life," and, wheeling abruptly, he hurried down the steps.

As he passed along the road in front of the cottage he saw Brian Lett holding sleeping Susie in his arms, Bert and Millie playing with the dog.

The mastiff left the children and followed him. It was Moore's dog.